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pertaining to the general organization and interests of the Modern Language Association of America.

4. The *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* shall, as heretofore, be edited by the Secretary, with the assistance of an Editorial Committee of two, one of whom shall be the Secretary of the Central Modern Language Conference.

We also recommend that the present committee be increased by the addition of Professor A. H. Tolman, of the University of Chicago, and that the committee of four thus constituted be authorized to receive and act upon any reply to the propositions herewith submitted that may be received from the Central Modern Language Conference.

George Lyman Kittredge, *Chairman*.  
James Morgan Hart,  
James W. Bright.

This report was adopted.

20. "Richardson and Rousseau." By Professor Benj. W. Wells, of the University of the South.

This paper was discussed by Professors A. Cohn and Henry Wood.

Professor Francis A. March was called to the President's chair.

21. "A Study of the Nature of Rhythm." By Miss M. A. Harris, of Yale University.

If we consider rhythm as a form or manifestation of the most fundamental activities of the mind, we shall be aided by a mass of data already accumulated concerning the rhythm of mental action, the periodicity of the power of attention, and the co-ordinating grasp which seizes the one in the many; or, should we consider it as to its close physical dependencies, previous investigators will point us to the salient rhythms of the body, particularly to the rhythm of the breath, and to the probability that these have fixed our ideas of rhythm in general, and in particular have determined the conditions of our language rhythms. It is the purpose of the present paper to use these two views severally in testing certain indications respecting the direction of practical work in the further investigation of language rhythm.

The rise and fall of the breath is possibly the first rhythm man notices; its earliest recognition may be the starting point of an appreciation com-

mon to men, and its rhythmic sequences in later life will continue to be an ever present standard of measurement and comparison. Further, we may perhaps take it for granted that man's first long communication to his fellows will be upon an emotion, that it will naturally clothe itself in rhythm, and that this expression may record not only the thought, but also its physical accompaniment and consequence, an unusual breathing,—hurried, retarded, strong or weak, labored or held, or all in succession.

This physical manifestation of excitement is doubtless different in different states of civilization, and preferred rhythms of literature will become more complicated as man's emotions become less simple. Yet of the perfect poem it will always be true that it will not only tell us in words what the author felt, but, by virtue of its rhythm, it will also reproduce in a sympathetic reader the thoughts' physical sign, the same alteration of the breath which it caused in the writer.

By means of this double induction the imagination is excited to a re-creation of the original passion, and the poem is treasured as a spell that can move the whole man. As such poems accumulate, men will attempt by dissecting them to obtain the charm of the form and, by classifying and systematizing, will find certain common laws; these are accumulated in treatises upon meter and versification, and an impression is given that by reproducing certain felicitous forms one approximates to poetry.

Here we come to the distinction between the rhythm of nature and the art of a set meter. "Rhythm," says one definition, "is movement characterized by regular or harmonious recurrence of stress" which, "when definitely measured by feet and lines of a given length, becomes meter." By a consideration of such definitions we are shown the true nature of the meter imposed upon the poet. It is the attempt to put the breath in harness, to make it repeat indefinitely a rhythm that once pleased, not only to measure but to fix it. Now while fixed and measured breathings or rhythms have a pleasing and soothing influence in themselves, we cannot believe that that poetry which is the record of rapidly changing emotion can long accommodate itself to a fixed form of rhythm—that is, to meter.

Something of this kind must have been in the mind of Poe when he denied the existence of a long poem, maintaining that there are only moments of poetry in a mass of verse that is unpoetical. The facts of the case seem to sustain this view, since in verses of emotion, even the best and the shortest, there are likely to be awkward and prosaic stanzas in which the jar between emotion and form is felt, or from which the emotion has altogether vanished. We infer therefore that the ideas which a set meter is best suited to record are those sometimes called the tranquil emotions, peace, trust, tenderness, resignation,—the emotions of tranquil breathing, not the passions.

Resting upon such convictions we hold rhythm to be an inseparable adjunct of poetry, and meter a separable adjunct. Words must succeed each other musically but they need not succeed each other in set fashion, or in

lines of fixed length; while a balance of time and a responsiveness of cadence are necessary to the musical effect which is one of the accompaniments of poetic speech, a balance and a cadence remaining practically unchanged through the expression of quickly changing emotion is, for the reasons given, unnatural if not impossible, and its attempt is pleasing only in proportion as the thought of the poet is replaced for us by his music.

Now, leaving the view which inclines us to the study of language rhythm in its immediate physical relations, let us turn to the consideration of it from that point which assumes that our notions of rhythm in general take their rise from the form or manifestation of the most fundamental activities of the mind.

A spontaneous effort of the attention—or with Wundt “a wave of apperception”—endures a second or more. Each strain of attention is followed by relief—one attends and relaxes attention. This is the rhythm in the attention to which reference was made above. The view taken is that only one undivided state of consciousness may arise during each pulse or wave of attention, and that the number of objects which can be grasped in that state must form an organic unity. Mr. Bolton after recording a number of tests made at Clark University concludes that<sup>1</sup> “a given number of auditory impressions within certain time limits, when presented in such a way that there is a kind of subordination among them with respect either to time, intensity, pitch or quality, or with respect to any two or more of these properties, always stands as a unit in consciousness.” It follows then that rhythm can arise only when in the succeeding units the mind recognizes a certain parallelism in the subordination of parts—a particular order or law, which dominates the structure of each member of a series of units; but this order may be found in sequences of subordinations that may arise with respect either to time, intensity, pitch or quality, or with respect to any two or more of these properties; it may therefore be based upon a very simple or upon a very complex unit structure, only there must be an inner theme, a minor motion, which shall present itself easily as a unit to the mind in its apperceptive moment and must bear such a relation to the following motions or variations of the theme, that it with them may be coördinated and pass into the structure of a higher and more complex unity.

It is clear that the power of perceiving rhythm ceases as soon as the mind loses its grasp upon the details, and can no longer find an underlying unity in the manifold variety.

On the other hand the power to see wholes, the coördinating, or carrying power of the mind is a growth, and varies in diverse states of civilization or development, even though it be one of the first requisites to mental action of the simplest kind.

In the application of these facts to poetic rhythm, an analogy is useful. In music we find primitive taste confined to simple sequences, a single tone

<sup>1</sup>*Am. Journal of Psychology.* Vol. VI.

repeated in beats of 2-4 time seems to give real pleasure, not only to savages and children, but to many a person whose faculties in other respects are far from rudimentary. Musicians, however, not only demand further complexity for their fullest satisfaction, but have lately gone so far as to profess a taste offended by pronounced rhythms, and gratified by the veiled sequences of the German music, which is still caviar to the general.

Returning to language rhythm, we shall find in the simple succession of stressed and unstressed syllables a rhythm recognized and enjoyed by very young children—a higher coördinating power is necessary for the enjoyment of verse based on assonance and balanced verse sections, such, for instance, as are found in Old English poetry; a still further coördination is that which finds in the English poetry of a later time still, unity in the complexity of the stanzas which the Elizabethans moulded on classic forms. Yet from this we have progressed further to the enjoyment of a rhythm still more involved, which introduces substituted feet and run-on-lines. In Shakespeare's later writings these substitutions and run-on-lines are so numerous that he practically escapes altogether from the limits of meter into a free and unclassified rhythm, which is, however, in such perfect accord with the thought—so fused and welded with it—that to read the rhythm falsely is to prove that one has missed the thought; this is true, also, of certain of the finest passages of Milton, and of Browning, and in some rare instances of exaltation it is true of Tennyson also. Under stress of a dominating thought or inspiration their verse becomes rhythmic prose.

Taken as a whole these phenomena show that as poetic thought becomes more complex, it has refused to find its abiding place in the forms imposed upon English verse by the Latin Renaissance, no less than in those which sufficed in the eighth century; and that it tends to leave the recognized field of meter for the larger measures of an unexplored rhythm.

So whether we advance through the consideration of the physical relations of rhythm to breath, or through the more abstruse consideration of the coördinating power of the mind dealing with phenomena presented to it in its pulses of attention, we find ourselves drawn to the same conclusion. In either case the escape from the forms known as metrical into a more complex rhythm seems not only reasonable but inevitable, and we are forced to believe that the future advance of rhythmic literature is likely to be along the lines of further complexity; since no one would be so bold as to affirm that we have already recognized the possible unity in complexity which may arise through "subordinations either in respect to time, intensity, pitch, or quality, or in respect to any two or more of these properties."

But for the present;—if the increasing complexity of emotion and the advance in coördinating power has already developed a poetic taste which finds satisfaction in the sequences vaguely named as the rhythm of impassioned prose, would it not be well frankly to admit that our present nomenclature is inexact and misleading, that to call that prose which gives us our highest poetic satisfaction, and that poetry which is in fact but the

form of a past glory, is to delude ourselves, and those whose opinions we influence.

Since the instinct of the poet has long ago recognized a harmony profounder than those the metrist-critics have known, why should we of the laity continue to explain away and ignore the presence of a higher law in the music we have not yet been able adequately to measure by any rule of thumb? Should we not rather turn to the serious study of the rhythm that speaks in impassioned prose, and seek to discover the subtle laws, which in the ears of our great masters have so transcended the ones discovered by our metrists, laws which must reveal a variety in unity much more complex than those now understood, and show us the short and simple sound theme replaced by one of greater length and complexity, upon which the variations tend to become more and more involved as the mind attains greater coördinating power?

22. "The home of Walter von der Vogelweide." By Professor H. S. White, of Cornell University.

Remarks upon this paper were offered by Professor Henry Wood.

23. "Chaucer's development in rime-technique." By Professor George Hempl, of the University of Michigan.

Remarks upon this paper were offered by Professor G. L. Kittredge.

24. "A phonetic transcription of a Louisiana Folk-Lore tale." By Professor Alcée Fortier, of Tulane University. [Read by title.]

25. "Conjectural restoration of the so-called *Carmen Gothicum*." By Professor A. Gudeman, of the University of Pennsylvania. [Read by title.]

26. "Some unpublished poems of Fernan Perez de Guzman." By Professor Hugo A. Rennert, of the University of Pennsylvania. [Read by title.]

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President and Mrs. Timothy Dwight gave a reception at their home, 126 College Street, to the ladies and gentlemen of the Association, Friday evening, December 27th.

#### FIFTH SESSION, DECEMBER 28.

The fifth regular session was called to order Saturday, December 28th, at 9.30 a. m.

27. "The Italian *novella*." By Dr. Mary Augusta Scott, of Baltimore, Md.

When we compare the *novella* with the corresponding form of fiction in English, the novel, we are at once struck by the fact that historically, for us, the romantic drama lies between. The *novella* precedes the drama and the novel follows it. The English novel, from Richardson to Mrs. Humphry Ward, implies the previous existence of the English drama; for elaboration of motive and development of character, it has no other counterpart. The *novella*, on the other hand, is a drama in *decimo sesto*; it is short, sketchy, concentrated; it does not, even collectively, aim at giving a well-rounded picture of life and manners, and individually, it has little or no personality; very often it is no more than a *bon mot* or repartee, and the novelist, like Poggio or Sacchetti, is but a raconteur.

The origin of the *novella* in mere anecdote, together with the natural objectivity of the Italian mind, explains one of its most striking characteristics, its air of reality. All the novelists pretend that their tales were originally recited and then written down, and there can hardly be a doubt but that they were really read aloud, or improvised, on occasions similar to those invented by Boccaccio, Grazzini, and others. The fact that the popular *novella* attained a permanent literary value only in Italy, the importance of a corresponding form of the Italian drama, the improvisations of the *commedie dell' arte*, and the high cultivation of acting in Italy, an art in which the Italians have always excelled, all go to prove that the *novelliero* was what he claimed to be, literally a story-teller.

Recitation in its turn affected the style of the *novella*; a short story that is told must have point, focus. So the *novelliero* introduces his characters simply by name, and very often even names are superfluous; of the six characters in Giraldi's story of Othello, only one, Disdemona, has a name. The environment is of the baldest kind, and the whole force of the narrative is expended on the action, which is always consistent, the most natural outcome of the circumstances. But of explanation of motives, of development of character, of ethical intention, as in the drama and novel, the *novella* has none.